



## THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING *Strong & Healthy Relationships*

Strong, healthy relationships are critical to your overall health and well-being. Studies have found that having a variety of social relationships may help reduce stress and heart-related risks. Strong social ties are even linked to a longer life. On the other hand, loneliness and social isolation are linked to poorer health, depression, and increased risk of early death.

Every relationship exists on a spectrum from healthy to unhealthy to abusive. One sign of a healthy relationship is feeling good about yourself around your partner, family member, or friend. You feel safe talking about how you feel. You listen to each other. You feel valued, and you trust each other.

It's important for people to recognize and be aware of any time where there is a situation in their relationship that doesn't feel right to them or that makes them feel less than who they are. It's normal for people to disagree with each other. But conflicts shouldn't turn into personal attacks. In a healthy relationship, you can disagree without hurting

each other and make decisions together.

### SIGNS OF UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

If you grew up in a family with abuse, it may be hard as an adult to know what healthy is. Abuse may feel normal to you. There are several kinds of abuse, including physical, sexual, and verbal or emotional. Hurting with words, neglect, and withholding affection are examples of verbal or emotional abuse.

In an unhealthy or abusive relationship, your partner may blame you for feeling bad about something they did or said. They may tell you that you're too sensitive. Putting you down diminishes you and keeps them in control.

In a healthy relationship, however, if you tell your partner that something they said hurt your feelings, they feel bad for hurting you. They try not to do it again.

Abuse in an intimate relationship is called domestic or

intimate partner violence. This type of violence involves a pattern of behaviors used by one person to maintain power and control over someone that they are married to, living with, or dating now or in the past. A pattern means it happens over and over.

In an unhealthy or abusive relationship, you may not be allowed to spend time with family, friends, and others in your social network.

## HOW TO FORM HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

### FOR LIFE

Studies have shown that certain factors seem to protect people from forming unhealthy relationships over their lifetime. The protection starts early in life. Some research has shown that the quality of an infant's emotional bond with a parent can have long-lasting positive or negative effects on the ability to develop healthy relationships.

A family that functions well is central to a child's development. Parents can help children learn how to

listen, set appropriate boundaries, and resolve conflicts. Parents teach children by example how to consider other people's feelings and act in ways to benefit others.

Secure emotional bonds help children and teens develop trust and self-esteem. They can then venture out of the family to form other social connections, like healthy friendships. In turn, healthy friendships reduce the risk of a child becoming emotionally distressed or engaging in antisocial behaviors.

On the other hand, having an unhealthy relationship in the family, including neglect and abuse, puts a child at risk for future unhealthy relationships.

Healthy friendships and activities outside of the home or classroom can play protective roles during childhood, too. In fact, everyone in a community can help support the development of healthy connections. Adults can serve as good role models for children, whether the children are their own or those they choose to mentor.



### HOW TO HELP SOMEONE IN AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

- » Show your concern and let them know you care
- » Ask for them to share their feeling and listen without judging or blaming
- » Tell them that it's not their fault
- » Offer to go with them to talk to someone who can help